Remember Remember the 5th of November And the Last Honest Man to Enter Parliament

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Growing up, I never really knew the real story of Guy Fawkes. Nobody told us. It was hidden behind tradition.

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In the late 70's and early 80's in the days before Bonfire Night, as we used to call it, my brothers and the local kids would gather as much wood as we could find to build the biggest bonfire our parents would allow.

We made a "Guy" each year by stuffing mom's old tights with newspaper, dressing them up in some old clothes and hat to vaguely resemble something human-like, then wheel it round the village in an old wheelbarrow, shouting, "Penny for the Guy!" — trying to scrape together enough change for some sweets for the big night.

Then, on November 5th, we'd plonk "Guy" on top of the bonfire and set it alight, and sometimes ourselves in the process, one year my brother thought petrol would be the best lighting agent.

The point was that on November 5th every year, we'd throw the bad "Guy" on top of the fire and watch him burn and have some fun. We didn't think about who he was. He was just the bad guy. The traitor.

I still remember the rhyme we sang —

"Remember, remember, the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason and plot.
I see no reason why Gunpowder Treason should ever be forgot."

Now I'm an adult — and I've had the luxury of learning the truth. That rhyme means something very different to me now.

Guy Fawkes wasn't a bad guy at all. He was the opposite. A hero. A man who fought for what he believed in — which, in his case, was the right to practise his faith without being hunted down for it.

Back then, being Catholic in England could get you fined, tortured, or killed. The king had promised tolerance and then done the opposite. Fawkes and his group had simply had enough. Their plan wasn't madness — it was desperation.

And when you strip away the centuries of propaganda, you start to see it for what it was: a group of people pushed so far by tyranny that they decided to blow up the

system itself.

It didn't work, of course. The Gunpowder Plot was foiled and Fawkes sentenced to death by being hung, drawn and quartered. A sentence so medieval I'd like to explain just how barbaric it was.

Being hung, drawn and quartered wasn't just a death sentence — it was a performance. A warning.

First they'd drag you to the gallows behind a horse, sometimes for miles, then they'd hang you in front of a bloodthirsty crowd, but not until death. Just long enough for the world to fade and the pain to start turning to relief — and then they'd cut you down. While you were still alive, they'd drag you to a table, slice you open from chest to groin, and pull out your intestines and lay them out before you and the baying crowd to see. Then they'd cut off your manhood, your head, and finally your limbs — all to be displayed in public as a message to anyone else thinking about defying the Crown.

Guy Fawkes was having none of that. He robbed them of their theatre. He jumped from the ladder and broke his own neck — denying the executioner and the Crown their final act of cruelty.

Now, does that sound like something you want to celebrate tonight?

I don't. Not with the way this country is currently criminalising speech, arresting people under **terrorism** laws for their political beliefs. No, I won't be going to a bonfire this evening.

I'll be watching **V for Vendetta** instead.

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